DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 190 927 CG 014 574

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TITLE A Profile of Three Groups of Inner City Women: The Relationship between Locus of Control, Childrearing Attitudes and Practices, and Degree of School Involvement.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 12p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (52nd, St. Louis, MO, May 1-3, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Rearing: Disadvantaged: *Inner City: *Locus of Control: *Mother Attitudes: Mothers: Parent Child Relationship: *Parent Participation: *Parent School Relationship: Profiles: Tutoring
IDENTIFIERS *Right to Read

ABSTRACT

Current research suggests that a lack of involvement and a sense of powerlessness pervades many aspects of life for the inner city poor, including childrearing. In the late 1960's, as the movement to involve parents in their children's schools grew, an assumption took root that such participation would help alleviate parents' feelings of powerlessness and increase parental identification with the schools. The relationships between the mother's locus of control, her childrearing attitudes and practices, and her school involvement were examined as part of an evaluation of a Right to Read parent tutoring program. Three groups of inner city women were interviewed: mothers paid to tutor children in reading, mothers with high volunteer involvement in school, and mothers low in school involvement. Paid tutors were significantly more likely than uninvolved mothers to engage their children in high quality activities and to feel they could effect changes in school. Unpaid, involved mothers fell between but were not significantly different from either group. School involvement did not affect mothers' overall feelings of efficacy. Mothers who believed that chance events controlled their lives had lower educational aspirations for their children and were less involved and responsive to them. (Author)

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ED190927

A Profile of Three Groups of Inner City Women: The Relationship Between Locus of Control, Childrearing Attitudes and Practices, and Degree of School Involvement

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Three groups of inner city women were interviewed: mothers paid to tutor children in reading, mothers with high volunteer involvement in school, and mothers low in school involvement. Paid tutors were significantly more likely than uninvolved mothers to engage their children in high quality activities and to feel they could effect changes in school. Unpaid, involved mothers fell between but were not significantly different from either. School involvement did not affect mothers' overall feelings of efficacy. Mothers who believed that chance events controlled their lives had lower educational aspirations for their children and were less involved and responsive to them.

CG 014574

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Much has been written about how inner city poor feel a lack of control over their lives (Lewis & Freedle, 1977; Gordon, 1973). Literature on the subject frequently mentions that low income, poorly educated people feel alienated from, and are uninvolved in, social and political groups and institutions (Rothman, 1974). Current research suggests that this lack of involvement and sense of powerlessness pervades many aspects of life, including childrearing. An emerging theme is that low income parents feel that they have little influence in the lives and development of their children (Minuchin, at al., 1967) and that they can convey these feelings of helplessness to their children (Lewis & Freedle, 1977). Tulkin (1977) points out, however, that there is great variation in childrearing within social classes.

In the late 1960's, as the movement to involve parents in their children's schools grew, an assumption took root that such participation would help alleviate parents' feelings of powerlessness and that parents would identify with the schools (Lopate, et al., 1969; Cloward & Jones, 1962). Kagan and Schraft (1979) studied the effects on parents' attitudes of an inner city school's policy to actively encourage paid and volunteer parental participation. They found that low income, paid participating mothers, unlike low income unpaid volunteers, were more like school-involved middle class mothers in aspirations for their children and how influential they felt in the schools. Another study of how school participation relates to feelings of normlessness and powerlessness, was done by Winters (1975) in an inner city school. Parents who were involved in the school tended to accept the values of the school and

society as their own, while uninvolved parents were more likely to feel they had to violate such norms to get ahead. However, Winters found that feelings of powerlessness were evident in both school involved and uninvolved inner city parents, suggesting that such feelings are too ingrained to be affected by school participation.

Our study was part of an evaluation of the affects of the federally funded Right to Read parent-tutoring program on participating parents and children. Relationships between the mother's locus of control, her child-rearing attitudes and practices, and her school involvement were examined.

Subjects

Three groups of inner city women were interviewed for the study; all had at least one child in elementary school. Nine women who were paid by the Right to Read program to tutor children in reading comprised the tutor group. These women were interviewed during their first year with the program. The second group was made up of ten involved mothers, named by principals and school staff as frequent and active participants in school life. The nine uninvolved mothers were described by principals and school staff as having low levels of school participation.

Procedure

The interview developed for this study concentrated on three areas.

A) Status variables. Information concerning number of children, mother's education, marital status, race, current and past employment was obtained for each subject.

B) Childrearing Attitudes and Practices. Questions included what grade

in school the mother hoped and expected her child to complete. Three rating scales were derived from the mother's responses to specific questions about her child's behavior. The "toy provision" scale rated the type and variety of toys the parent made available to her child and the parent's criteria for choosing toys. The "parental responsiveness" scale rated how the mother responded to her child's actions and questions and her perception of her child's integrity. The third scale, "mother's interaction with child," rated the number and type of activities that parent and child shared.

C) Involvement in School and Community. These questions concerned the mother's participation in Head Start and her child's school. A "school optimism" rating was based on the mother's responses to whether she thought things needed changing in school and if parents could successfully effect those changes. The interview covered involvement in community activities such as political, social or religious groups or whether the parent had ever voted. A "neighborhood change" scale was based on the parent's responses to whether there were things she would change in the neighborhood and whether she thought she could.

D) A locus of control (LOC) measure developed by Hanna Levenson (1973a,b) was given. Three subscale scores indicated how much the mother felt that she, powerful others or chance controlled her life.

Each mother was interviewed and given the LOC measure once in the fall and once in the spring.

Results

Repeated measures analysis of variance indicated that there were no significant time effects for either measure; this was evidence of the measures'

stability. Therefore, all results reported here are based on averages of fall and spring data.

A) Status variables. The three groups were very similar on all variables except mother's employment (See Tables 1 & 2). Uninvolved mothers were significantly more likely to work full-time than involved mothers ($p<.05$). Tutors fell in between but were not significantly different from the other two groups.

B) Childrearing Attitudes and Practices. The only significant difference occurred on the "mother's interaction with child" rating. Tutors and uninvolved mothers were significantly different ($p<.05$); involved mothers fell in between the other two groups and were not significantly different from either. Tutors were significantly more likely to engage their children in daily, high quality, creative activities than the uninvolved group.

C) Involvement in School and Community. There were significant group differences in school involvement: tutors and involved mothers both were significantly more active in school than uninvolved mothers, ($p<.05$) validating our selection process. There were also group differences on the "school optimism" rating: tutors were significantly more likely to feel they could effect changes in the school than were uninvolved mothers ($p<.05$). Involved mothers fell in between but were not significantly different from the other two groups.

D) There were no significant group differences on the LOC measure. (See Table 3). For the groups combined, the mean internal score was very similar to that found by Levenson (1973a) for both a normal and a psychiatric population. The means on the powerful others scale and the chance scale

were more similar to the psychiatric population than the normal.

The LOC subscale scores were significantly correlated with several interview items (for the entire group). A high internal score was positively correlated with the school optimism rating (.393, $p<.05$). A high powerful others score was negatively correlated with mother's involvement in Head Start programs (-.477, $p<.05$) and mother's education (-.383, $p<.05$). A high chance score was negatively correlated with mother's interaction with child (-.416, $p<.05$), parental responsiveness to child (-.534, $p<.01$), grade mother hoped child would complete (-.502, $p<.01$) and mother's education (-.445, $p<.05$).

Conclusions

It would appear that parental involvement in school does not affect overall feelings of helplessness. Parents who were paid to tutor children were more likely to feel they could have an impact on the school in which they were involved than were mothers with high or low levels of volunteer participation. Mothers who strongly believed that chance events controlled their lives tended to have lower educational aspirations for their own children and were less involved and responsive to them.

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TABLE 1

STATUS VARIABLES

No. of Children	Mean	SD	N*
Total	3.607	2.225	28
Tutor	4.111	2.767	9
Involved	3.400	1.625	10
Uninvolved	3.333	2.108	9

Mother's Education	Median Years
Total	12.0
Tutor	12.0
Involved	11.5
Uninvolved	11.0

Percent Married	Percentage
Tutor	56%
Involved	50%
Uninvolved	56%

Percent Mother's Employed	Percentage
Tutor	100%
Involved	30%
Uninvolved	78%

*Note. The total number (N=28) remains constant as does the number of tutors, involved, and uninvolved.

TABLE 2

Racial composition

Tutors	Black	89%
	Latino	11%
Involved	Black	80%
	White	10%
	American Indian	10%
Uninvolved	Black	89%
	White	11%

TABLE 3

LOCUS OF CONTROL SUBSCALE SCORES

Internal	Means	SD	N*
Total	34.037	6.358	26
Tutors	35.188	5.247	8
Involved	33.500	6.125	9
Uninvolved	33.333	6.992	9
Powerful Others			
Total	20.333	8.966	
Tutors	19.188	7.782	
Involved	18.500	7.036	
Uninvolved	22.500	10.888	
Chance			
Total	22.092	8.994	
Tutors	18.375	8.528	
Involved	23.944	7.360	
Uninvolved	23.333	9.830	

*Note. The N remains constant.